Defending your Property

Bushfire Survival Planning Template



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Your Bushfire Survival Plan

Use this guide to help you write your Bushfire Survival Plan. It is important to read the Fire Ready Kit in its entirety while developing and discussing your plan with your household. You will need to consider your personal circumstances and how they will affect your plan.

Not everyone thinks clearly in an emergency. A written and well-practised plan will help you remember what needs to be done during a fire. It also lists the preparations you will need to undertake to help become fire ready.

Your plan needs to outline:

- Actions before the bushfire season.
- Actions during the bushfire season.
- Actions on or before fire risk days.
- Actions when fire is in your area.
- Actions as the fire front approaches.
- After the fire front has passed.
- Your back-up plan.



Fill out this Template and keep it handy

Introduction

- Every year you will need to update your plan.

  What year is this plan for ? ______________________________

- Who is this plan for ? ______________________________

In high-risk areas, leaving early is the safest option on **Code Red** days. Do not wait and see. Know your trigger to leave – make a decision about when you will leave, where you will go, how you will get there, when you will return and what you will do if you cannot leave.

Most houses are not designed or constructed to withstand fires in **Code Red** conditions. Defending your home is very risky. You could die or be seriously injured.

Only consider staying with your property on **Extreme** or **Severe** days if you are fully prepared and can actively defend your home. Defending a house requires at least two fit and determined adults who are physically and mentally prepared to work long and hard in arduous and difficult conditions. It also requires at least 10,000 litres of water, protective clothing, and appropriate firefighting hoses and pumps.

If you are not prepared to the highest level, leaving high-risk bushfire areas early is your safest option.

Children, the elderly, or people with special needs should be well away from the threat. The safest option is to leave early.

Attend a community meeting in your local area. Check **cfa.vic.gov.au** or call the Victorian Bushfire Information Line (VBIL) on 1800 240 667 for meeting dates and locations.

If you – or someone you care for – will need help to prepare and leave early when there is high fire risk, get a Red Cross *Bushfires: Preparing to Leave Early* guide at **cfa.vic.gov.au** or request a copy by phoning VBIL on 1800 240 667.

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Actions before the bushfire season

Preparing your property – vegetation management

Managing the vegetation on your property will reduce a bushfire's intensity.
This will reduce the amount of direct flame contact and radiant heat on your house.

It is also a good idea to form or join a local Community Fireguard Group. Stay and Defend workshops may be offered by CFA in your area. Enquire through your CFA Regional Office.

Managing the vegetation includes:

- ☑ Clearing fine fuels from around your home (fine fuels are those that are the same thickness or less than a pencil, such as grass, bark and leaves).
- ☑ Keeping grass areas well trimmed and watered. Grass should be no more than 10 centimetres high.
- ☑ Raking up and reducing leaf litter (dead leaves). Leaf litter must be no more than one centimetre high.
- ☑ Removing flammable mulch from around your house. It is extremely dangerous if used within a 10-metre radius of your home especially under windows.
- ☑ Removing or trimming shrubs. There should be no shrubs over one metre next to or below windows.
- ☑ Trimming tree branches overhanging your house.

- Who will do this? ______________________________
- What else will you do?

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Preparing your property – house maintenance

This includes:

- ☑ Clearing gutters of leaves and rubbish.
- ☑ Ensuring underfloor areas are enclosed or screened.
- ☑ Sealing gaps, vents and roof spaces to prevent embers entering your house.
- ☑ Storing fuels and chemicals away from your house.
- ☑ Keeping any LPG cylinders on a level concrete surface and secured by a chain. Face vent pipes away from the house.
- ☑ Moving woodpiles away from the house.

- What else will you do?

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- Who will do this? ____

- List any firefighting equipment you need to purchase.

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- Have you put together a protective clothing kit for each member of your household? Y ☐ N ☐
- Is there anything you still need? Y ☐ N ☐ ____
- Have you stored your protective clothing in an easy-to-access location? Y ☐ N ☐
- If yes, where have you stored this clothing? ____
- Do you have other important firefighting equipment, such as mops, metal buckets, ladders and shovels or rakes? Y ☐ N ☐
- Do you have adequate house and contents insurance? Y ☐ N ☐
- List your irreplaceable family keepsakes and valuables. Identify a safe location to store these valuables. Where will you store them? Consider moving these out of the area during summer.

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> Discuss your plan with all family members. Everyone should be aware that staying to defend may involve trauma, injury and possibly death.

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Actions during the bushfire season

- ☑ Check Fire Danger Rating daily.
- ☑ Monitor conditions.
- ☑ Do regular maintenance in your home and garden to reduce fine fuels. This includes weeding and cleaning out your gutters. List anything specific that you will do.

- ☑ Check firefighting equipment – for instance, pumps, hoses and backpack water sprayers – and carry out maintenance as required.
- ☑ Check you have plenty of fuel for your pumps and that the fuel is clean.
- ☑ Check you have sufficient water supplies. You may need to increase your independent water storage.
- ☑ Put battery-powered or wind-up torches and radios in an easy-to-find place. Ensure you have spare batteries.

- Where you will secure or move your pets and livestock?

Actions on or before fire risk days

Even people who are well prepared can die fighting fires at home.

- What is your trigger to activate your plan of action? How will you know that a fire is approaching?

Actions:

- Check that your protective clothing is current and easily accessible (Your kit must have a long-sleeved shirt or jumper, long trousers, broad-brimmed hat, goggles for eye protection, sturdy footwear, gloves – natural fibres only, not synthetics).
- Fill inside water storage such as your bath, laundry trough and buckets. This is a back up for when the power goes out.
- Fill outside water storage.
- Check all equipment is working (for instance, pumps, hoses and backpack water sprayers) and set up in the required locations.
- Move garden furniture, doormats and other loose outdoor items away from the house.
- Move furniture away from the windows to reduce the chance of a fire starting if embers enter your house.
- Set up a ladder under the manhole.
- Store a torch in the roof cavity.
- Move stock or large animals to a cleared or grazed-down paddock. Take all rugs and halters off horses.
- Secure pets in a safe place.
- Listen for alerts and warnings on ABC local radio, commercial radio stations and designated community radio stations, watch SKY News TV or visit **cfa.vic.gov.au**. You can also receive warnings through @CFA_Updates on Twitter.

■ Ensure you have enough drinking water set aside for all those actively defending. How will you store this and where will you locate it?

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■ Call family, friends and neighbours and let them know you are activating your Bushfire Survival Plan. List their contact details here.

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■ What else will you do?

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Actions when fire is in your area

- ☑ Dress in protective clothing (this is always the first thing you do).
- ☑ Shut all windows and doors to prevent smoke and flames entering your house.
- ☑ Close window shutters.
- ☑ Switch your air conditioner or evaporative cooler to recycle/recirculate mode to reduce the amount of indoor smoke, or turn it off.
- ☑ Turn off mains gas supply.
- ☑ Block downpipes and fill gutters with water.
- ☑ Place wet wool blankets or cotton towels around window and door edges inside the house to stop smoke and embers getting in.
- ☑ Hose down the side of the house facing the fire and the garden area close to the house.
- ☑ Move cars, tractors and caravans away from the house into a clearing.
- ☑ Take any animals inside.
- ☑ Listen for alerts and warnings on ABC local radio, commercial radio stations and designated community radio stations. You can also watch Sky News TV, visit **cfa.vic.gov.au** and receive warnings through @CFA_Updates on Twitter.
- ☑ Keep a battery-powered or wind-up radio close in case power, telephone or mobile phone reception is cut.
- ☑ Keep an eye out for embers that the wind may be carrying. Extinguish them with wet mops, backpack sprayers or a fire hose.
- ☑ Turn on your sprinkler system if there is one.
- ☑ Drink lots of cool water often even if you don't feel thirsty.

■ What else will you need to do?

Power could be cut off or disrupted by the fire. Mains water pressure could fail as other residents and fire trucks access water. Telephone lines could be cut by falling trees and mobile coverage can quickly become congested. Loss of power will prevent cordless phones and electric pumps from working.

Actions as the fire front approaches

As the fire front approaches it will become extremely hot outside. You will be unable to survive out in the open. You must protect yourself from radiant heat and move inside.

- ☑ Go inside when it becomes too hot to stay outside. The skin on your ears and hands will alert you that radiant heat has become too hot to survive outside.
- ☑ Take all your plastic firefighting equipment inside with you, including taps and hoses, because they can melt if left outside.
- ☑ Stay inside with doors and windows shut, shutters or curtains drawn, but be alert to where the fire is. Don't hide in a part of the house where you can't see the progress of the fire. You may need to wind up shutters to check the fire's status.
- ☑ Make sure you have more than one exit in every room used as a shelter. Most bathrooms are unsuitable to shelter in. They typically have only one door which can make escape impossible if that exit is blocked by flames and heat. Any place of shelter within a house or building should have two points of exit.
- ☑ Check for embers in the roof and elsewhere in your home.
- ☑ Drink lots of cool water often even if you don't feel thirsty.
- ☑ Keep cool by splashing your face with water.
- ☑ If your house catches fire, close the door to the room that is alight and progressively close all doors moving to the other end of the house. Always have more than one exit from each room. Move outside, shielding yourself from radiant heat, when you can. Do not return to the house for any reason.

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After the fire front has passed

Exercise extreme caution before deciding to go outside – depending on what is burning around you, the levels of radiant heat could be very high and potentially fatal. You will need to use your own judgement to assess when it is safe.

- ☑ Continue to wear your protective clothing and go outside again as soon as it is safe to extinguish any small fires that may have started.
- ☑ Water down the outside of the house, including the roof.
- ☑ Drink lots of cool water often even if you don't feel thirsty.
- ☑ Call family, friends and neighbours to let them know you are safe.
- ☑ Actively patrol your property for embers for hours after the fire has passed.
- ☑ Places to look for embers include:

  – on roof lines and in gutters

  – in garden beds and mulch

  – around outdoor furniture

  – in woodpiles

  – on doormats

  – in sheds and carports

  – on verandahs and decking

  – on window ledges and door sills

  – under the house

  – inside the roof

  – under the floorboards.
- ☑ If you have lost your power supply and have frozen food, do your best to try to keep it cold. If food is still cold to touch, less than 5˚C, it is safe to use.
- ☑ Once cold or frozen food is no longer cold to the touch, it can be kept and eaten for up to four hours and then must be thrown out.
- ☑ If power is restored when frozen food is still cold to the touch (less than 5˚C), the food is safe to refreeze.
- ☑ Have details for your local council as a first point of contact for recovery assistance after a fire.

Your back-up plan

If it becomes clear that it is not safe to stay and defend, what is your back-up plan? Survival must be your main priority.

- What is your plan if your equipment fails? Consider having back-up equipment. Where is this stored?

- Leaving as a last resort is extremely dangerous. Where do you plan to shelter if it is unsafe to leave your property or your area? Shelter options may include a well-prepared property or home (for instance a neighbour), a private bunker (that meets current regulations) or a designated community shelter or refuge.

- Do you have a designated Neighbourhood Safer Place **(Place of Last Resort)** in your area that could be used as a last resort?

- Other last resort options when fighting for your life may be a stationary car in a cleared area, a ploughed paddock or reserve, or a body of water such as a dam or swimming pool.

  Note: Last resort options do not guarantee survival. There is a high risk of trauma, injury or death.

- What other things do you need to consider in your planning?

For more information about bushfires visit cfa.vic.gov.au or
call the Victorian Bushfire Information Line (VBIL) on 1800 240 667
or via National Relay Service on 1800 555 677

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